

Solzhenitsyn on Communism

Advice to the West, in an "hour of extremity"

Some Soviet dissidents still argue that their country's Marxist-Leninist system can be reformed from within. Not Alexander Solzhenitsyn: he has never swerved from his belief in the inherent evil of Communism. Last week, the Nobel-prizewinning novelist composed this essay for *TIME* in response to the crisis in East-West relations created by the Soviet conquest of Afghanistan. Solzhenitsyn argues that Afghanistan is merely the latest demonstration of the U.S.S.R.'s insatiable desire for world conquest. As in his grim 1978 Harvard commencement address, he chides the West for weakness. But the West may yet prevail, he says, if it will recognize that Communism and the people oppressed by it are not one and the same.

Many Americans will find Solzhenitsyn's views too harsh, his vision too chilling. But the reflections of Russia's greatest living writer on today's crisis merit wide attention.



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There are two reasons for this string of capitulations. First is the spiritual impotence that comes from living a life of ease; people are unwilling to risk their comforts. Second, and just as important, is the prevailing, total incomprehension of the malevolent and unyielding nature of Communism, which is equally dangerous to every country.

The West began its perilous miscalculation of Communism in 1918: from the very beginning the Western powers failed to see the deadly threat that it represented. In Russia at that time, all previously warring factions—from the government forces to the Constitutional Democrats and the right-wing Socialists—united against Communism. Though the peasants and workers were not formally allied with these groups, and were not coordinated, thousands of peasant revolts and dozens of worker uprisings reflected the masses' opposition to Communism. A Red Army was mobilized by executing tens of thousands of men who tried to evade Bolshevik conscription. But this Russian national resistance to Communism received scant support from the Western powers.

The most fantastically rosy notions about the Communist regime circulated in the West, and so-called progressive public opinion greeted it with joy, in spite of the fact that by 1921, 30 Russian provinces were undergoing a Cambodia-like genocide. (In Lenin's lifetime, no fewer innocent civilians perished than under Hitler, and yet today American schoolchildren, who invariably regard Hitler as the greatest villain in history, look upon Lenin as Russia's benefactor.) The Western powers vied with one another to give economic and diplomatic support to the Soviet regime, which could not have survived without this aid. Europe took no notice of the fact that some 6 million people in the Ukraine and the Kuban River basin had died of hunger.

In 1941, the worth of this much-touted regime became apparent to the world: from the Baltic to the Black Sea the Red Army retreated as if swept away by the wind, in spite of its numerical superiority and its excellent artillery. There was no precedent for such a rout in a thousand years of Russian history and, indeed, in all military history. In the first few months of the war, some 3 million soldiers had fallen into enemy hands! Here was a clear statement of our people's desire to be rid of Communism. The West could not have failed to understand if only it had wanted to see. But in its nearsightedness, the West held that the sole threat to the world resided in Hitler and that his overthrow would end all danger. The West did what it could to help Stalin forcibly harness Russian nationalism for the Communist cause. And so, in World War II, the West defended not freedom in general but merely freedom for itself.

In order to buy Stalin's friendship at the end of the war, the West turned over 1.5 million people who were then in Allied hands and who did not wish to return to Stalin's tyranny. Among them were entire Russian divisions, Tartar and Caucasian bat-

alions, as well as P.O.W.s and forced laborers numbering in the hundreds of thousands, including old men, women and children. Stalin manipulated Roosevelt with ease, effortlessly assuring himself of control over Eastern Europe: Yalta marked the beginning of a 35-year streak of American defeats, only briefly interrupted in Berlin and Korea. (When there was the will to resist, victory followed.) As I have written on earlier occasions (in 1975 in an article entitled "The Big Losers in the Third World War" and in the book *Warning to the West*), the entire period from 1945 to 1975 can be viewed as another world war that was lost by the West without a battle and in which some two dozen countries were abandoned to Communism.

Western diplomats depend on unsound hypotheses that involve supposed "left" and "right" factions of the Politburo, when, in reality, all of its members are united in seeking world conquest and are indiscriminating in the means they use. Insofar as struggles do occur within the Politburo, they are purely personal; they cannot be used for diplomatic leverage. The average Soviet citizen, deprived though he is of information about the world and of the benefits of Western Kremlinology, understands this perfectly well. Illiterate Afghan herdsmen are equally on target when they burn portraits of Marx and Lenin, instead of accepting the tale that their country was occupied simply because Leonid Brezhnev happened to be ailing.

Try asking a malignant tumor what makes it grow. It simply cannot behave otherwise. The same is true of Communism; driven by a malevolent and irrational instinct for world domination, it cannot help seizing ever more lands. Communism is something new, unprecedented in world history; it is fruitless to seek analogies. All warnings to the West about the pitiless and insatiable nature of Communist regimes have proved to be in vain because the acceptance of such a view would be too terrifying. (Did not the Afghan tragedy in fact take place two years ago? But the West shut its eyes and postponed recognizing the problem—all for the sake of an illusory détente.) For decades it has been standard practice to deny reality by citing "peaceful coexistence," "détente," "the Kremlin leadership's pursuit of peace." Meanwhile Communism envelops country after country and achieves new missile capabilities. Most amazing is that the Communists themselves have for decades loudly proclaimed their goal of destroying the bourgeois world (they have become more circumspect lately), while the West merely smiled at what seemed to be an extravagant joke. Yet destroy-

ing a class is a process that has already been demonstrated in the U.S.S.R. So has the method of exiling an entire people into the wilderness in the space of 24 hours.

Communism can implement its "ideals" only by destroying the core and foundation of a nation's life. He who understands this will not for a minute believe that Chinese Communism is more peace-loving than the Soviet variety (it is simply that its teeth have not yet grown), or that Marshal Tito's brand is kindly by nature. The latter was also leavened with blood, and it too consolidated its power by mass killings, but the weak-hearted West preferred not to take any notice in 1943-45. He who understands the nature of Communism will not ask whether the world's aid is reaching the starving Cambodians through the good offices of the Heng Samrin regime. Of course it does not. It is confiscated for the army and government. The people can starve.

Communism needs the whole charade of détente for only one purpose: to gain additional strength with the help of Western financing (those loans will not be repaid) and Western technology before it launches its next large-scale offensive. Communism is stronger and more durable than Nazism, it is far more sophisticated in its propaganda and excels at such charades.

Communism is unregenerate; it will always present a mortal danger to mankind. It is like an infection in the world's organism: it may lie dormant, but it will inevitably attack with a crippling disease. There is no help to be found in the illusion that certain countries possess an immunity to Communism: any country that is free today can be reduced to prostration and complete submission.

Nevertheless, healers frequently turn up to pronounce the following reassuring diagnosis of the acute infection that is Communism: "This malady is not contagious; it is a hereditary Russian disorder." The cure they propose involves avoiding angering the Brezhnev regime at all costs. Instead, it must be supported and equipped. They insist that the enemy to be opposed is any manifestation of the Russian national consciousness, when, in reality, it is the only force that is realistically capable of weakening Soviet Communism from within. The case against the Russian national consciousness is systematically being argued by noted American academics and journalists, who are using irresponsible and tendentious data supplied by some recent émigrés from the Soviet Union.

Such propaganda is sheer madness and serves only to disarm the West. After the forces of Russian nationalism were betrayed by the West in the Russian civil war and once again in World War II, here is an open call to repeat this betrayal yet a third time. This would have ruinous consequences for the Russian people and for the other peoples of the U.S.S.R. It would be just as ruinous for the West. Today the Communist leadership with its decrepit ideology once again dreams of saddling and bridling Russian nationalism in pursuit of its imperial goals. The West must not now equip a horseman intent on the West's destruction.

Communism is inimical and destructive of every national entity. The American antiwar movement long nurtured the hope that in North Viet Nam nationalism and Communism were in harmony, that Communism seeks the national self-determination of its beloved people. But the grim flotilla of boats escaping from Viet Nam—even if we count only those that did not sink—may have explained to some less ardent members of the movement where the national consciousness resides and always did reside. The bitter torment of millions of dying Cambodians (to which the world is already growing accustomed) demonstrates this even more vividly. Take Poland: the nation prayed for just a few days with the Pope; only the blind could still fail to distinguish the people from Communism. Consider the Hungarian freedom fighters, the East Germans who keep on dying as they try to cross the Wall, and the Chinese who plunge into shark-infested waters in the hope of reaching Hong Kong. China conceals

its secrets best of all; the West hastens to believe that this, at least, is "good, peace-loving" Communism. Yet the same unbridgeable abyss, the same hatred separate the Chinese regime and the Chinese people.

An identical chasm exists between Communism and the Russian national consciousness. It pains us that the West heedlessly confuses the words Russian and Russia with Soviet and U.S.S.R. To apply the former words to the latter concepts is tantamount to acknowledging a murderer's right to the clothes and identification papers of his victim. It is a thoughtless blunder to consider the Russians the "ruling nationality" in the U.S.S.R. The Russians were the recipients, under Lenin, of the first crushing blow. They suffered millions of victims (with the most outstanding killed off selectively) even before the genocidal collectivization of agriculture. At the same time Russian history was reviled. Russia's culture and its church were crushed. Russia's clergy, nobility, merchants and finally its peasantry were destroyed. Though the regime's blows fell next on the other nationalities, the Russian countryside today has the lowest standard of living in the U.S.S.R., and Russian provincial towns have the lowest priority in the distribution of consumer goods. In huge areas of our country, there is nothing to eat, and the purchases of U.S. grain do not improve the people's diet (the grain goes to military stockpiles). The Russians make up the bulk of the slaves of the Soviet state. The Russians are exhausted; their debilitation is becoming hereditary, their national consciousness has been debased and suppressed.

Nothing could now be further from the heart of the Russian people than a militant nationalism; the idea of an empire is repulsive to them. But the Communist regime watches its slaves carefully and takes special pains to suppress their non-Communist consciousness. The result: enormous labor camp terms for the proponents of freedom (Igor Ogurtsov—20 years, Vladimir Osipov—16 years, Yuri Orlov—seven years); the new arrests of priests, the spiritual teachers of the people (Gleb Yakunin and Dmitri Dudko); the destruction of the innocent Christian Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights; the continuing mass imprisonment of young Christians; the exile of Andrei Sakharov.

In expectation of World War III the West again seeks cover, and finds Communist China as an ally! This is another betrayal, not only of Taiwan, but of the entire oppressed Chinese people. Moreover, it is a mad, suicidal policy: having supplied billion-strong China with American arms, the West will defeat the U.S.S.R., but thereafter no force on earth will restrain Communist China from world conquest.

Communism stops only when it encounters a wall, even if it is only a wall of resolve. The West cannot now avoid erecting such a wall in what is already its hour of extremity. Meanwhile, however, 20 possible allies have fallen to Communism since World War II. Meanwhile, Western technology has helped develop the terrifying military power of the Communist world. The wall will have to be erected with what strength remains. The present generation of Westerners will have to make a stand on the road upon which its predecessors have so thoughtlessly retreated for 60 years.

But there is hope. All oppressed peoples are on the side of the West: the Russians, the various nationalities of the U.S.S.R., the Chinese and the Cubans. Only by relying on this alliance can the West's strategy succeed. Only together with the oppressed will the West constitute the decisive force on earth. This is also a matter of principle, if the West is to uphold freedom everywhere and not merely for itself.

This strategy will obviously entail radical conceptual changes and the rethinking of tactics on the part of Western politicians, diplomats and military men.

Five years ago, all my warnings were ignored by official America. Your leaders are free to ignore my present predictions as well. But they too will come true. ■

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